



**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

# News Release

*Pacific Islands External Affairs Office*

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## **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Seeks Public Input On Lehua Island Restoration Activities**

A proposed project to restore the native ecosystem on Lehua Island will be the focus of a public meeting held by officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources on Wednesday, June 9 in Lihue. The meeting is the first step in developing a joint federal/state environmental document that analyzes the restoration project.

"We're proposing to restore native seabird, insect, and coastal plant populations through eradication of non-native rodents and rabbits from Lehua Island," explained Chris Swenson, project biologist for the Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office. "At this point, we're seeking the public's help in identifying issues that need to be addressed during the environmental review process."

The meeting will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Lihue Neighborhood Center, located at 3353 Eono Street in Lihue. "The input we receive will help us ensure that all points of view are considered in the planning process," Swenson said. The U.S. Coast Guard, who has jurisdiction over the island, is cooperating with the Service and DLNR to prepare the environmental document.

Lehua Island - located approximately 31 kilometers west of Kauai - is known for its beauty and biological diversity. Seventeen species of seabirds have been recorded on Lehua, including nesting Laysan and black-footed albatross, and Newell's shearwaters, a federally threatened species. The island is a designated state seabird sanctuary, and is also home to several species of native coastal plants and insects.

The island is also home to non-native rats. Rats are known to have eliminated many seabird species from islands around the world. They also feed on native plants and insects, and can suppress or eliminate many of these species as well. In addition, non-native rabbits were introduced to Lehua during or before the 1930's. On many islands, rabbits have decimated the vegetation and competed with seabirds for use of ground burrows.

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Successful eradication of the non-native mammals would allow re-colonization and restoration of several species of plants and seabirds. The Service and DLNR are also proposing to develop the capability to rapidly respond to future reintroductions of non-native mammals.

The Service and DLNR are requesting written comments regarding the proposed action from interested individuals, organizations, and agencies. Respondents should address potential environmental issues, applicable mitigation, and reasonable alternatives they feel could be included in the environmental analysis. Written comments should be addressed to Chris Swenson, Project Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Honolulu, Hawaii 96850, or faxed to 808/792-9580. All written comments must be postmarked by June 23.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.